

Questions and Answers: National Animal Identification System

Q. What is the national animal identification system (NAIS)?

A. The national animal identification system is a national program intended to identify all food animals and livestock, as well as record their movement over the course of their lifespan. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to designing a comprehensive animal identification system that will allow for the tracing of all animals and premises potentially exposed to a foreign animal disease within 48 hours to ensure rapid containment of the disease and further protect U.S. animal health.

Q. Why is USDA developing the NAIS?

A. The key to safeguarding U.S. livestock and economic health from the effects of animal diseases is to have a national surveillance system in place that is comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated. The ability to identify livestock more quickly will enhance USDA's ability to respond to pests and animal diseases.

Q. What is USDA's goal for the NAIS?

A. USDA's goal is to create an effective, uniform, consistent, and efficient system by:

- Allowing producers, to the extent possible, the flexibility to use current identification systems or adopt new ones, but not burden them with multiple identification numbers, systems, or requirements;
- Providing data element standards;
- Remaining technology neutral in order to utilize all existing forms of effective technologies and new forms of technology that may be developed;
- Ensuring that the system does not preclude producers from being able to use it to add value by aligning production management with market incentives.

Q. Will USDA utilize the U.S. Animal Identification Plan (USAIP)?

A. USDA strongly values and appreciates the effort that the USAIP team has put forth in developing an animal identification plan. USDA plans to use the data standards developed through this partnership of more than 100 animal and livestock professionals from 70 associations, organizations, and government. USDA will continue to seek input from industry and other interested parties throughout the design and implementation of a national animal identification system.

Q. Will producer participation in the animal identification program be mandatory?

A. Initially, producer participation will be voluntary during the development of USDA's animal identification program. As the system continues to take shape and is tested for all livestock and food animals, USDA will reassess the need for making some or all aspects of the program mandatory.

Q. What technology will be used?

A. USDA recognizes that there is no "one-size-fits-all" technology. USDA supports a system that does not limit users to only one type of identification tool. Instead, USDA will remain technology neutral so that all existing forms of effective technology and new forms of technology that could be developed in the future may be utilized.

Q. How will the system be funded?

A. While there is funding in the fiscal year (FY) 2005 budget request for this program, USDA understands the need to get the animal identification system started now. As a result, \$18 million in emergency funding has been transferred from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to initiate the development of the infrastructure and initial implementation of an animal identification system in 2004.

Eventually, both private and public funding will be necessary to make the animal identification program fully operational. Federal and State governments, as well as industry, will share the cost of maintenance, probably with each of these entities covering certain aspects of the system.

Q. How will USDA protect producers' privacy?

A. USDA is aware of producers' concerns about the privacy of information collected in the animal identification system and is taking them very seriously as we explore the most effective means for collecting animal identification information. Federal legislation addressing the confidentiality and accessibility of information in a national animal identification database may be needed to address the concerns of livestock producers and processors, while expediting the implementation of the national animal identification system.

Q. What will be the cost to producers?

A. USDA is currently determining costs to individual producers.

Q. What is the timeline for implementation?

A. Although we are still developing our specific timeline for implementation and deciding on a funding mechanism, there are some preliminary and general indications of activities for 2004. An assessment of the capabilities of current systems in operation that will determine the capacity of any of these systems to serve as the basis for a national system has been completed.

Our first priority is to identify animal premises and develop a national repository where this premises information can be stored. We would like to develop the premises registration system in FY 2004, because it would allow us to allocate premises identification numbers to cooperating States and tribes that are ready to register premises. Once cooperators have integrated with the national system and are registering their premises, USDA would be in a position to issue animal identification numbers to producers through these early cooperators.

Beginning in FY 2004, USDA will also focus on identifying and qualifying third parties, such as private industry and trade associations, that have identification products or programs that could be integrated into the national system. By late fall 2004, USDA would then be in a position to issue premises and animal identification numbers to third parties and to begin receiving information from these parties into the national animal identification database.

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. For additional information visit <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/nais/nais.html>.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.